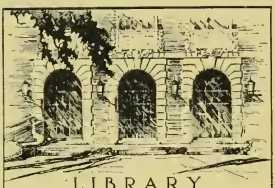

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THE CHURCH OF THE RICH.

A LETTER

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD STUART, M.A.,

VICAR OF S. MARY MAGDALENE'S CHURCH, MUNSTER SQUARE, REGENT'S PARK.

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A LETTER.

My Lord,

I take the liberty of writing to you, to express my great regret, that you should have thought it necessary, in your recent Charge, to attempt a defence of the Pew System. Surely this "abomination of desolation" has done the devil's work long enough amongst us already! It has driven out of the house of God, in our towns at least, that very class amongst whom Jesus Christ Himself lived; and has turned our parish churches into the private chapels of the rich, and our parish priests into a mere staff of chaplains to the gentry.

I regret greatly that you should have said what you have said on this subject. Not that it is at all likely to check that strong and growing feeling, which happily prevails amongst us, that it is a shame and a gross injustice in the sight of God and man to turn one whole class of parishioners out of their parish churches, but I fear that your words will be taken as a proof that it is in vain to look for sympathy from you towards those who are striving their uttermost to make the Church of England, once again, the Church of all classes equally; —not of the rich apart from the poor, nor yet of the poor apart from the rich,—but of "high *and* low, rich *and* poor, one with another."

You lament in your Charge the separation between rich and poor, and yet in the very same Charge you advocate a greater separation between them than has ever yet existed, by recommending the establishment of *two sets of churches* in all our town parishes,—one for the rich apart by themselves, the other for the poor apart by themselves! Dives and Lazarus separating from each other, with a great gulf placed between them *before the time!* If two sets of churches,—one for the rich and one for the poor, are *not* necessary in France and Belgium, how is it that they *are* necessary in England? do twenty miles of salt water really make all this difference?

You say it is idle to try and make a town church the church of the people at large, without distinction of ranks: "All old associations, all their prejudices are against it: it never was their church and it never will be; you must supply them their own place of worship, be it school-room, or much better, chapel or church." But will not this argument apply to the parish priest and to the Bishop as well as to the parish church? "he never was their minister and he never will be;—you must supply them with some other ministry," &c. &c. just what Dissenters and Roman Catholics are fond of saying! I will only observe that what you thus say is not the fact: for the parish church *is* their church, at this moment, in very many instances in our towns,—and it might be so in all, did not the selfishness of the rich laity and the indifference of the clergy acquiesce in the present abominable exclusion of the poor.

You speak of our "alienating most of the great middle class" by free and unappropriated churches:—at the same time you advocate one half of each church

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being left free and unappropriated;—(are you not here giving up one half of your principle?)—whom then will this line gall, which you would draw through the middle of each congregation?—not the rich, who will, *of course*, have pews;—not the poor, who, of course, will *not* have pews;—but just that very middle class itself, of which you speak; through some section of which the line must of necessity be drawn!

You say that a free and unappropriated church may be crowded by non-parishioners;—you forget to add that every non-parishioner who attends it, leaves so much available accommodation for others in the parish where he lives. Surely it is a very happy thing in a town that there should be several churches, conducted differently, within the limits of the Church of England, so that those who do not meet with what they want in the church of the district where they live, may be able to get it in some other neighbouring church; instead of all being tied together by the neck, as in a country parish, to squabble over the petty, paltry, sickening trifles—under cover of which "aggrieved parishioners" avenge their own *personal* quarrels with the clergyman.

You speak of "tens of thousands of men and women, respectable in their lives and respected worshippers in our churches, and dwellers in homes replete with comfort, elegance, luxury, who do absolutely nothing, and give next to nothing in discharge of those offices of charity, which done or not done to His brethren, are acknowledged as done, or reckoned as not done to the Divine Saviour Himself."—"Respectable and respected!" On what grounds?—because they "do nothing and give next to nothing" to religious and charitable works? Is this the reason why they are to

be "respected?" For myself, I have no respect for them whatever;—they are the great curse of the Church of England;—they are that dead weight of heartless formalism which hinders every effort of the clergy, and misrepresents the Church in the sight of the people. And yet this is the very class, the only class, which will thank you for your Charge! they will henceforth quote you as the champion of their selfishness, and, secure in the respectability of their hired pew, will laugh at the delicate insinuation that such "respectable and respected" worldlings really ought to be a little more in earnest in the service of CHRIST.

I do not desire to say more. Twenty years' experience has proved that all that was once said about confusion in free and unappropriated churches, is mere moonshine: the churchwarden's office and authority is quite sufficient to make such arrangements as effectually hinder anything of this sort. To say that people "like to know where to go" in church, is to praise free and unappropriated churches, for in them every one knows at once where he may go,—viz., to *any* unoccupied seat: to pretend that "families cannot worship together" in free and unappropriated churches, is simply nonsense, for they have only got to sit together *and do it*. For myself, I prefer the old-fashioned separation of men and women in church, and I believe nine men out of ten do so too;—a father and his sons on one side, the mother and her daughters on the other;—but, nevertheless, many churches are free and unappropriated without this separation. One thing however is clear as daylight, viz., that if the Church of England is not to continue for ever the Church of the Rich, a religion for Dowagers and Dignitaries, who find religion a very convenient

thing for keeping their children and servants in order; —if the Church of England is once again to be the Church of the English people at large, and not of a class only,—its Bishops their Bishops,—its clergy their clergy,—its churches their churches,—then, if this is to be the case once again, as I sincerely hope it may,—then that devilish invention of Mammon, the Pew System, which provides for the rich and drives out the poor, must be swept away from among us.

Jesus Christ "taught daily *in the temple*:"—He did not give up the house of God to the Scribes and Pharisees and respectable Mammon worshippers of the day, and "preach the Gospel to the poor" in an outhouse or schoolroom:—He drove the money-changers *out* of the temple:—let us imitate His example.

Trusting you will believe me when I say, that in writing the above, I have been actuated by no feeling other than that of respect and good-will towards yourself personally, however greatly I regret that part of your Charge to which I have referred,

I remain, my Lord,

Yours very truly,

EDWARD STUART,

Vicar of S. Mary Magdalene's,
Munster Square, Regent's Park.

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